

punish big oil. Big, big talk. Do you think anything is going to come out of it? The first thing they can do is give back the \$14 billion. The second thing they can do is give back the \$2 billion, all of which were assessed on the taxpayers to subsidize these companies.

So, Madam Speaker, it is wrong to hand out money to energy companies who are making massive profits, and then cut home heating assistance for our most vulnerable citizens, our senior citizens. And it is wrong to claim to be doing something when you are not, nor do you have any intention. And when you had a chance to do it, rather than help the consumers, what did you do? You actually produced a bill that actually increased the price of gas at the pump and gave \$14 billion that you did not have to big oil companies to support them to execute their business plan.

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Those are not the values of this country, and thank God they are not the values of the American people. We need a change of priorities. We need a new set of priorities. And we can do better, Mr. Speaker. The American people can do better. It is time we returned the People's House back to the people rather than to the auction house it has been to the big oil and gas companies.

HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. DRAKE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas. Madam Speaker, the people in the gulf coast States have always lived with the threat of devastating tropical weather, including hurricanes. In fact, the worst natural disaster to ever befall America was the Galveston hurricane of 1900.

To this day, I personally know many families who lost loved ones in this horrific hurricane some 105 years ago. In fact, my grandfather, who was only 8 years old at the time, barely survived the devastation, while some 10,000 perished trying to overcome the high waters.

My grandfather was heroically saved by rescuers who found him clinging to a tree in the flooded streets of Galveston. Sadly, it seems that history and nature have a way of repeating themselves.

Like in the Galveston hurricane of 1900, the streets of New Orleans were flooded to the tops of trees and homes by Hurricane Katrina, and people relied on the goodwill of others to survive that devastation. To that end, my home State of Texas has done an outstanding job in the Katrina relief effort, persevering in the face of Hurricane Rita, which made landfall on the Texas coast 1 month after Hurricane Katrina.

It goes without saying that our hearts and prayers are with those who are fighting for their lives and their

communities and the areas hit by these hurricanes. Despite their dire situation, I know how brave and capable the people are in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. They will overcome the damage and fully recover. They will rebuild and return home as they were meant to, but they will need our help and support.

Before Hurricane Rita hit, I visited the Katrina relief efforts in my district, and Vice President CHENEY and I met with the Texas Emergency Management Agency. They used computer models to demonstrate the effects of a hurricane similar to Katrina hitting the Texas coast. The images revealed that Galveston Island could be completely submerged and the streets of Houston flooded if a strong hurricane were to hit that region.

At the time, we could not have known that this similar scenario would play itself out in Texas in just a matter of days. Fortunately, Galveston and the greater Houston area were saved; and unlike Galveston a hundred years ago, there was no direct loss of life due to Hurricane Rita. This is due to the efforts of the real heroes of the State and local first responders who protected life before the storm struck.

To that end I would like to thank everyone who has stepped forward and helped the hurricane victims by donating, volunteering, and working together to overcome this tragedy, especially Texas Governor Rick Perry; Austin Mayor Will Wynn; Houston Mayor Bill White; Katy Mayor Doyle Callendar; Tomball Mayor, Hap Harrington; Harris County Judge Robert Eckels; Ann Hodge and the Katy Chamber of Commerce; Bruce Hillegeist and the Tomball Chamber of Commerce; Tomball Fire Department Chief Randy Parr; and the Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston. Their leadership, persevering through sheer tragedy, has been invaluable to the response and recovery process from both storms.

This cooperation partnership, brotherhood, community and faith, all succeeding in the face of absolute disaster, is truly an example of the resilience of the American spirit.

If nothing, this can teach us that if we plan ahead and work together, we can save lives and overcome the worst of nature's fury. This common bond is our duty as friends, as neighbors, and as Americans.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF MEDICARE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening during this 40th anniversary year of Medicare as a strong supporter of this critical health insurance lifeline to all of America's families. On July 30, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed Medicare into law, the most important and successful family insurance program our Nation has ever known.

Medicare was created to provide health insurance to the elderly and disabled in part because only about half of our Nation's elderly and almost all of the disabled actually never had had health insurance. Medicare also played a fundamental role, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, in desegregating the American health insurance system by assuring access to care regardless of race or age.

Medicare began with 19 million beneficiaries, and since then it has served a total of approximately 105 million people over the last 40 years. Medicare has evolved over time to help beneficiaries maintain health, prevent disease and injury and provide better benefits, including more preventive care, even as inflation pushed the cost of health care higher and higher.

Medicare, which covered about 42 percent of expenditures for the elderly in 1968, covered about 55 percent by 1997. Without it, citizens simply could not cope financially as private companies reneged on their promised health and pension benefit to retirees.

Today, Medicare provides comprehensive health insurance for nearly 42 million Americans, which includes more than 35 million senior citizens and 6 million people under 65 years of age who are permanently disabled. It continues to achieve its purpose of improving health and financial security for beneficiaries by assuring access to affordable health care and contributing to the significant decrease in poverty among the elderly, which has fallen from nearly 30 percent in 1966 to approximately 10 percent in 2002. What a profound accomplishment we have achieved as a people to make the golden years livable, not threatening.

Most recently, however, in 2003, this Congress moved to add a prescription drug benefit coverage program to Medicare. While I have always supported Medicare as an important lifeline for seniors and the disabled, I could not support this particular legislation championed by the current Republican Party and the pharmaceutical industry. It did nothing to lower the exorbitant prices of prescription drugs, and yet it provides windfall profits to these very drug companies.

The bill is known as the Medicare Prescription Drug Modernization Act, and it was passed in this Chamber only after the Republican leadership bent their own rules during an all-night session to hold open the vote past the normal 15 minutes to nearly 3 hours as they twisted arms to get the bill passed.

I supported the Democratic plan that would have really provided an affordable drug plan for our seniors. Among the shortcomings of the law that seniors are now dealing with is that our government is not permitted to negotiate with the drug companies for the best price. I tried to get that amendment included in the bill and waited up in the Rules Committee until 4:30 in the morning and was denied my ability